

Exhibit No. 3Date 3-20-07Bill No. HB 608

Good morning Chairperson Schmidt, members of the committee

It's a privilege to have this opportunity to speak to you today regarding HB 608. My name is Teresa Cowan, I am the executive director of a child abuse prevention agency that has been serving Missoula County for 26 years, and for the past 5 years the Parenting Place has been a Montana Children's Trust fund grant recipient. I would like to give you a glimpse of what a typical program might accomplish with a grant of \$15,000 from the Trust Fund.

First and foremost, our programs very often cost more to operate than we ever have in our budgets, but being the resourceful, practical and capable managers that we are, we find ways to capitalize on that \$15,000 and use it to leverage funds from other sources as a means of sustaining our programs, however, many of our agencies continue to have waiting lists for services.

The Parenting Place offers a research based, best practices approach to child abuse and neglect prevention through parent education, home visiting/mentoring services, extended family support and respite child care to families affected by incarceration. We provide parenting classes at the Missoula Pre Release Center, where we are able to begin building a relationship with the parent, that relationship provides an avenue to become involved with their children and extended family, who we provide support, respite child care and parent education to as well. Upon a parents release from PRC, we "follow" them right out the door and into the community, back into their homes, back into the role of parent. Our Parent Aide home visiting program offers the individualized support that these families need in order to be successful.

I would like to share with you some statistics that we have gathered over the past 4 years, which reinforce the concept that prevention really does save money.

Over the course of 4 years The Parenting Place has worked with:

178 incarcerated parents through Missoula Pre Release Center  
These families represent a total of 22 counties

71 women  
107 men

Through our work with these parents we also provided service to their extended family and children, which includes **an additional 31 adults and 372 children.**

Currently, the State of Montana is experiencing a corrections' recidivism rate of 47.7% for males and 44.6% for females. This means that a significant number of the men and women leaving pre release or prisons are re offending and returning to those facilities, only to continue costing Montanans more money. Why is this important to note? Because current programming funded by Montana Children's Trust Fund includes our Parent Aide Program that I have been talking about. We are working with this population

of incarcerated individuals, who also happen to be parents. Through diligence and dedication we have worked to create a successful program and we submit to the committee today that with a recidivism rate of only 14% in the population we serve ... our program is just that: successful.

With our recidivism rate of 14%, only 25 parents (out of the 178 that we have worked with) have re-offended and returned to prison or pre release. But, if we had not provided services to these parents and they experienced the state rate of recidivism, which could be averaged for our purposes today to be 46%, 80 parents of that 178 could be costing our state an average of \$76/day.

Due to the substantial difference in our recidivism rate and that of the state, it appears that The Parenting Place may be, in part, responsible for preventing 55 parents from returning to prison or pre release.

**Those 55 individuals @ \$76 / day would cost our state an astounding \$ 1,525,700 in a years time.**

Besides saving over 1.5 Million dollars, the best thing about keeping those 55 parents in the community, in their home and in their role as parent, is that they will be utilizing their new skills and knowledge to break the cycle of abuse, neglect and criminality for their children.

**Montana Children's Trust Fund grantee agencies across the state can tell you similar stories, provide you with similar statistics about families they have kept out of our most costly systems—corrections and health and human services. Your (our) investment today is truly a responsible response to Montana taxpayers.**

**Thank you.**